

Regional Road Trip

Around the Îles de la Madeleine

Tour distance: 85 km (52 mi.) of road from Havre Aubert to Grande Entrée

Regions: Gaspésie and Îles de la Madeleine

You could drive the islands from Havre-Aubert to Grande-Entrée in a day, but you'd miss the fishermen unloading their catch at the docks, and you wouldn't have time to browse the art shops, see a lighthouse, or taste great seafood. And what about kayaking into those hidden caves dug in the rust-red cliffs by the waves or spending a sunny day basking a sandy beach? Really, meandering is the only way to take them in.

POINTS OF INTEREST:

1. Île du Havre-Aubert - Located at the southern end of the archipelago, Havre-Aubert is the most forested island of the group. The two main communities are Havre-Aubert and Bassin. The first Acadians to arrive on the islands settled in Havre-Aubert, and their influence can still be seen in local architecture, business and fishing operations.

2. Le site historique de La Grave - *La grave* – “small shore” in English – was the place where the whole village and the fishermen met and traded. Classified as an historic site by the ministère des Affaires culturelles in 1983, today it's no less a vibrant place of commerce where painters, jewellery makers and potters have set up shop in charming boutiques alongside restaurants and cafés.

3. Plage du Havre-Aubert - Accessible by Chemin du Sable from Havre-Aubert. This highly popular beach is home to the annual *Château de sable* sandcastle competition. You can walk for several kilometres along the sandy shore to the point at Bout du Banc, where you'll get a fabulous view of Entry Island.

4. Île Cap-aux-Meules - The second largest island in the Archipelago (after Havre-Aubert), “mussel cape” has the largest population and is the islands' service and administrative centre. It's also where the ferry from the mainland docks. The main districts are Cap-aux-Meules, L'Étang-du-Nord and Fatima.

5. Wind sports in L'Étang-du-Nord - The winds of the Îles de la Madeleine do not go to waste! Thrill seekers come here for its great kite surfing, power kiting, bugging and power kiting. Lessons are available.

6. Parc de Gros-Cap, L'Étang-du-Nord - This park's shoreline of red sandstone carved by the sea is a delight to behold. The whole family can rent kayaks to explore it as well as the natural passages and caves drilled by the waves over time. This is also the home of the famous black guillemot: it's best to go before the end of August to see them at their peak.

7. Le site de la Côte, L'Étang-du-Nord - A popular place by the fishing harbour where *Madelinots* like to stroll, it has boutiques, a concert hall, a restaurant with patio, walking trails and a bike path. Of interest is the Centre d'interprétation sur la mariculture; mariculture is the part of aquaculture that involves the cultivation of marine organisms for food and other uses. The Figurative Painting Symposium takes place here at the end of July.

8. Entry Island (Île-d'Entrée) - This small island populated by 130 English-speaking people (who call the archipelago the Magdalen Islands) is the only one not connected to the rest of the archipelago by dunes. You can get there by ferry, kayak or Zodiac from Cap aux Meules. A walker's paradise, there are places to stay for the night. You'll see wild horses and domestic animals grazing in common areas. An emerald isle in its own right. Big Hill, the highest point of the archipelago, offers a superb view.



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9. Île du Havre aux Maisons - Like Entry Island, this one is also treeless. Although it's home to the islands' airport, it remains an unspoiled flat landscape with winding roads and colourful homes scattered around one of the archipelago's most beautiful islands.

10. La butte à Mounette - Make sure you climb Butte Chez Mounette, which gives a good view of Dune du Nord, a lagoon and Île aux Cochons. It's also a great spot to take in a sunset.

11. Chemin de la Pointe-Basse - It's best to take the Chemin de la Pointe-Basse by bicycle so you can enjoy the magnificent views along the way. In between beautiful traditional homes, you'll come across the fromagerie Pied-de-Vent (cheese factory) and the Fumoir d'Antan—Économusée du poisson fumé, where you can see them smoke herring, just like in the old days.

12. Phare du Cap-Alright - Continue along to the end of Chemin de la Pointe-Basse until you come to the Chemin des Échoueries. Stop at the Cap Alright lighthouse for a spectacular view over grey cliffs, Plaisance bay and Entry island. Follow Chemin des Montants to the other side of Butte Ronde (Round Hill) to see a peaceful and stunningly beautiful little valley with a scattering of houses.

13. Plage de la Dune-du-Sud - Sand dunes as far as the eye can see. With its red cliffs sculpted by the ocean, it's one of the most beautiful beaches in the islands. Behind the dunes you'll find quiet, deep hollows of warm sand for you and your family to play or rest in. Well equipped camp grounds and cottages.

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15. Île aux Loups, Pointe-aux-Loups - Another find is the artisan boutiques in Pointe-aux-Loups, where you'll see objets d'art and crafts, pastels, watercolours, oil paintings, jewellery, sculptures, handwoven textiles, leather and seal fur.

16. Grosse Île and Île de la Grande Entrée - These islands contain the best preserved natural environments in the archipelago. The East Point Wildlife Reserve connects the islands to each another. The English-speaking inhabitants of Grosse Île and the French speakers of Grande Entrée are mostly fishers and fish plant workers.

17. East Point National Wildlife Reserve, Île de la Grande Entrée - This National Wildlife Area, administered by Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service, preserves and protects the remains of an ecosystem unlike any other in the province. It includes all the islands' typical flora and fauna, and is an important staging area for many species of ducks and shore birds. There are two nature interpretation trails, Les Marais Salés and L'Échouerie, accessible from route 199 after Grosse-Île and before Old Harry. Access to the reserve is free, and a guided tour is available.

18. Plage de la Grande Échouerie - One of the largest and most beautiful, Grande Échouerie beach makes up the coastline of the East Point National Wildlife Reserve. The beach seems to go on forever, and you can walk it to the end where you may see seals playing in the water. Along the way you'll catch a view of the Cap Alright lighthouse. The sand is fine, and the kids will go crazy exploring the caves and cliffs at low tide.



19. Rochers-aux-Oiseaux (Bird Rock) - This high rocky islet is located 32-km northeast of Grosse-Île in the middle of a shipping lane for vessels entering the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It serves as a refuge for colonies of aquatic birds such as petrels, northern gannets, razorbills, murres and gulls. Although difficult to get to, guided boat excursions are available.

20. Réserve écologique de l'Île Brion - This reserve protects ecosystems that are typical of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, such as those where the white spruce and the balsam fir grow. You can reach the reserve via ecotourism outfitters Vert et Mer, who provide interpretation on the trails, via boat departures from Grosse Île. However, to ensure no footprints are left behind, only a few visitors at a time are allowed. You can also take Zodiac tours of Île Brion (excluding the reserve).

21. Cave explorations at Auberge La Salicorne - Adventure seekers will love diving out to see these caves, some of the most interesting in North America. Emotions range from awe inspiring to thrilling, depending on the wind and the waves. All participants wear wet suits, helmets and flotation vests.

22. Port de pêche de Grande-Entrée - Situated pretty well at the end of the road, this is the largest fishing harbour in the Îles de la Madeleine. Everything related to fishing is happening here. Watch the fishers come in with their catch!

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Access to the Îles de la Madeleine:

Option 1: Fly from Montréal or Québec City. Car rental available on the islands.

Option 2: Ferry Cruise from Gaspésie to IDM

The ferry (CTMA Vacancier) takes nine hours, leaving Chandler, in Gaspésie, Saturday evening and arriving Sunday morning. The return trip leaves every Tuesday evening, arriving in Gaspésie Wednesday morning.

Option 3: Ferry Cruise from Montréal to IDM

The trip from Montréal to the islands takes two days. In season, departures are every Friday afternoon to arrive at the islands Sunday morning. Departures are every Tuesday evening, arriving at Montréal Friday morning. On the way the shores of the St. Lawrence River roll lazily by – with all their beauties for you to enjoy. You'll sail past Québec City, Tadoussac and the Gaspesian coast before reaching the isles. Guided tours are available on the Îles de la Madeleine during your three-day stopover. On the way back, you can stop at Percé during a stopover in Gaspésie on Wednesday, while you can explore the old capital of Québec City on Thursday.

Various companies provide tours of the islands by coach or minivan for those who prefer to leave their vehicles on the mainland.

For more details, visit their website at www.ctma.ca/traversier-madeleine/croisiere-609-escale-et-itineraires.cfm

